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## Second Languages: a cross-linguistic perspective

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## Book reviews

*Second Languages: A cross-linguistic perspective.* Roger Andersen (Ed.). Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1984. pp. ix + 428.

For quite some time, second language acquisition researchers have been reminded, with irritating persistence (and not without justification), that second language acquisition research has been overly anglo-centered. This book is a fitting reply to that criticism since it is "based on the premise that a sound understanding of the acquisition and use of a second language requires evidence from a wide range of different second (and first) languages acquired and used in a variety of settings" (introduction, p. 1). The book is part of a cross-linguistic series on second language research and the subtitle promises to provide "a cross-linguistic perspective" of second language acquisition. To what extent research works reported here are (1) cross-linguistic in nature; and (2) comparable, are issues to which I shall return later.

The book is organized into seven parts, one for each of the six languages – Swedish (Part 2), Dutch (Part 3), Spanish (Part 4), French (Part 5), German (Part 6), English (Part 7), and a cross-linguistic first language acquisition (native language acquisition) research section (Part 1) to serve as a general theme of the book.

The editor provides a general introduction explaining the organization of the book and also a brief and very useful introduction to each of the parts that puts all the chapters within a part in proper perspective.

In Part 1, Berman provides an excellent treatment of native language acquisition research and relates it to the partly similar and partly dissimilar nature of second language acquisition research. She identifies four central issues in native language acquisition that have consequences for the study of second language acquisition: (1) Which aspects of child language development are revealed as universal, compared with those that are constrained by the form and/or content of the particular language being learned? (2) Given that certain patterns of development are shown to be universal, are these due to general cognitive development, or do they manifest unique, specific linguistic properties? (3) Across languages, what aspects of linguistic structure and the form/content relationship pose special difficulties for the learner, and how can these be predicted and explained? and (4) What principles can be detected across children learning different languages, in terms of such strategies as overregulation or one-to-one mapping between form and meaning?

Berman discusses these views from native language acquisition perspective and offers very insightful comments. However, when she tries to relate these to second language acquisition research, it appears as though she has not taken into consideration certain pioneering work already done in that research. For in-

stance, she says, "clearly, for second language acquisition studies the crux is that if all children share certain kinds of knowledge by virtue of being speakers of any language at all, then such knowledge need not be acquired from scratch in learning a second language, and the question then is what the precise content is of this potentially 'positive' type of transfer" (p. 16). The *content* of "positive" and/or "negative" transfer is something that has been very well documented in the second language acquisition literature. (For a recent thinking on this and related issues, see papers in the volume edited by Gass and Selinker, 1983, and the references there.) Similarly, regarding her discussion (pp. 21-22) on typological parameters, it is worth noting that significant progress has been made in these aspects too. Papers in the recent volumes edited by Davies, Criper, and Howatt, 1984; Eckman, Bell, and Nelson, 1984; and Rutherford, 1984, show how universal and typological constraints do or do not operate in second language syntax, semantics, phonology, and discourse. Berman probably prepared her paper before these volumes appeared on the shelves. It is, however, gratifying to note that studies on the lines suggested by Berman have started yielding valuable insights into typological/universal aspects of second language acquisition.

Berman also proposes two interesting concepts: one is a language-setting continuum with native language acquisition and foreign language acquisition as the two ends, and bilingualism, prepuberty second language acquisition, and adult second language acquisition as other points on the continuum. From this continuum, she derives a hypothesis: "the further along the language learning setting is from native language acquisition on the continuum . . . , the greater will be the impact of learner-internal variables" (p. 18). The other is a schematic frame of reference for comparison of errors across different language learning situations: (1) nonerror; (2) native language error only; (3) native language/second language shared; (4) second language error only; and (5) "late" error. In this context, she says, and I agree, that attention "needs to be paid to early versus late errors, to transient versus fossilized errors, and to those areas of language learning which seem peculiarly error-free" (p. 26). I think these two concepts are a useful contribution and can be profitably applied in second language acquisition research. She also raises interesting methodological issues. More on these later.

In Part 2, Hyltenstam studies the use of typological markedness conditions as predictors in second language acquisition, with particular reference to pronominal copies in relative clauses. His study is truly cross-linguistic in the sense that he deals with four different first languages. He raises two interesting questions: (1) To what extent can development and learning problems in a particular first language/second language setting be predicted on the basis of the typological notion of markedness? and (2) Can patterns of variability in the learners' output also be related to patterns of typological markedness; that is, does an ordering of contexts from favorable to nonfavorable parallel to any extent a markedness hierarchy? He concludes that his findings are "in full accord with our hypotheses about the interrelationship between markedness condition and second language acquisition patterns" (pp. 55-56). His study is based on his hypothesis which is schematically presented in Table 1. Based on this hypothesis, he makes a number of predictions about the relationship of transfer and

Table 1. *A hypothesis about markedness conditions in initial stages of interlanguage under different first language/second language conditions*

Row	Native language	Target language	Initial stages of interlanguage
1	Unmarked	Unmarked	Unmarked
2	Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked
3	Marked	Unmarked	Unmarked
4	Marked	Marked	Unmarked

Source: Hyltenstam's Table 3 (p. 43).

markedness conditions. I believe that his hypothesis and his predictions have taken us a significant step forward in understanding the influence of typological markedness in second language acquisition. Interestingly, Comrie (1984, p. 14) also presents a similar hypothesis that predicts "properties that are common cross-linguistically (and thus low in markedness) might be acquired easily even where neither native nor second language evinces that property." Recent studies by Mazurkewich (1984, 1985) and Wode (1984) also lend credence to the hypothesis put forth by Hyltenstam and Comrie. While these hypotheses seem to take us closer to formulating a theory of markedness in second language, a voice of caution is also worth hearing:

Whatever the correct theory of markedness for learning is, it must provide means for capturing the fact that it will sometimes not be particularly difficult for a speaker to learn certain aspects of the grammar which are on universal grounds highly marked. It is only when the accounts of learning address such issues that there will in fact be anything plausibly approaching a theory of markedness for second language acquisition. (Kean, 1984, p. 20)

In Part 3, Hulstijn reports results of an investigation into the extent to which adult learners of Dutch exhibited a command of two Dutch word order rules, and the extent to which they had an explicit and/or implicit knowledge of these rules.

In Part 4, Andersen addresses two very important questions, which, to my knowledge, have not been fully treated before: (1) What does a second language learner do early in his acquisition with a feature known to be "late acquired"? and (2) Is the learner's solution to the impossibility of incorporating that feature into his second language system a barrier to his eventual acquisition of the feature and/or to communication in the second language? Andersen's goal is to better our understanding of the universal principles that govern the early construction of a minimal linguistic system and the consequences the nature of that system have for future learning and communication. In the course of his paper, Andersen repeatedly makes an important methodological statement to which I shall return later. Included in the same part is Muysken's study which analyzes a number of linguistic features of the Spanish of five socially stratified groups within the same national linguistic community to show that second language acquisition is governed by social norms and is not strictly a cognitive phenomenon. He concludes, quite rightly I think, that "different groups of learners

aim for different target norms'' (p. 118). This statement makes perfect sense particularly in the context of different varieties of English around the world today and should make second language acquisition researchers take cognizance of sociolinguistic aspects of second language acquisition.

Part 5 contains four chapters. Adiv reports on language learning strategies: the relationship between first language operating principles and language transfer in second language development. Harley's study deals with age as a factor in the acquisition of French as a second language in an immersion setting. Noyau and Trevisse report on their study on individual variation and language awareness of Spanish speakers of French. Veronique's study deals with the acquisition and use of aspects of French morphosyntax by native speakers of Arabic dialects. I shall comment on Adiv's study. Her study is truly cross-linguistic in the sense that data were obtained from children with French and Hebrew as second languages using the same research procedures and including comparable linguistic features in the two languages so that a comparison could be made across languages as different as French and Hebrew. Her purpose was twofold: to investigate whether second language development is similar in two very structurally different languages, and to examine whether restructuring of a deviant form is slower when first language transfer and overgeneralization may be operating simultaneously to produce that form. Her results suggest that neither intensity of instruction nor cumulative time of exposure to the second language greatly influences the relative degree of difficulty that the learners seem to experience in acquiring the various grammatical features examined in the study. Her work reveals that some of Slobin's first language operating principles are applicable to second language development. This amply supports Berman's idea that second language acquisition research can benefit immensely from the findings of cross-linguistic research in native language acquisition.

The four chapters included in Part 6 deal with German as a second language. An interesting study in this section is that of Pfaff. In a way, her work can be taken as a partial answer to a challenging question posed by Berman: What is it that "renders highly proficient" second language usage of the kind described as "near-native" still "non-native"? (p. 25). She focuses on the German language produced by children of immigrant workers in Germany and finds subtle traces of first language influences still apparent in their otherwise fluent German. The other three chapters in this part are reports by Clahsen (the acquisition of German word order: a test case for cognitive approaches to L2 development); Dittmar (semantic features of pidginized learner varieties of German); and Nicholas (developmental sequences and the role of the copula in the acquisition of German as a second language).

The final part focuses on English as a second language. A truly cross-linguistic study included in this section is that of Stauble. She reports on research involving adult speakers of two typologically different languages (Spanish and Japanese) in their acquisition of English in a naturalistic, noninstructional setting. The main goals of her investigation are: (1) To describe the development of the English verb morphology exhibited by learners along the Spanish-English continuum as well as that exhibited by learners along the Japanese-English negation continuum; and (2) To compare the characteristics of the Spanish-English con-

tinuum with those of the Japanese-English continuum. On the basis of her findings, she claims that "a second language learner's negation characteristics can be employed as a gross measure of his English verb phrase morphology development" (pp. 351-352). Stauble's study is the first step toward finding answers to "questions as to whether a single continuum exists for all second language learners or whether there exist separate continua which vary according to native language background" (p. 352). The other three works included in this part are Schumann's study on nonsyntactic speech in the Spanish-English bilingual; Zobl's study on aspects of reference and the pronominal syntax preference in the speech of young child second language learners, and Lightbown and Libben's study on the acquisition and use of cognates by second language learners.

I now return to two methodological issues I raised in the first paragraph of this review: (1) To what extent research works reported in this book are cross-linguistic in nature; and (2) To what extent these studies are comparable.

Table 2 presents a summary list of research projects reported in this volume. The table, at once, reflects the strength as well as the weakness of this book. The strength is that data for some of the studies were collected from second language learners belonging to a number of first/second languages thereby giving us, as the editor promises in the introduction, a cross-linguistic perspective of second language acquisition. It should, however, be noted that the editor uses the term *cross-linguistic* to refer to various types of studies. In his introduction to Part 1, Andersen paraphrases four different types of cross-linguistic native language acquisition research outlined by Berman in Chapter 1: (1) Comparisons from secondary sources, each on a different language and often difficult to compare because of a diversity of linguistic areas studied and research paradigms and methodologies; (2) Examining in the acquisition of one or more other languages claims made about a particular language; (3) Experimental studies on two or more languages using comparable research procedures; and (4) Projects that bring together individuals working independently on different languages to assess language acquisition from a cross-linguistic perspective. Further, his own study (Chapter 4) deals with only one second language and with a very language-specific feature. He, however, argues that his study is "cross-linguistic" because his research question (what does a second language learner do early in his acquisition with a feature known to be "late acquired"?) is of cross-linguistic importance in the sense that this question "could be addressed as easily with *do*-support in English, the VERB END rule in German or Dutch, or the case system of Russian" (p. 75). I am not sure whether "cross-linguistic" is the appropriate term to describe a study of the kind reported by Andersen. It seems to me that we should make a distinction between cross-linguistic studies that deal with more than one first/second language and monolingual studies that might have cross-linguistic implications.

The weakness of the book, in my view, relates to the second methodological issue raised above - the issue of comparability. As Table 2 clearly shows, different researchers have followed different research procedures. This, it seems to me, will make comparability of studies more difficult and interpretation of findings less dependable. As Andersen rightly points out,

Table 2. *Summary list of research projects reported in this volume*

Author	Subjects					
	N	Age	First language	Second language	Proficiency level (second language)	Task type
Hyltenstam	45	Adults	Finnish, German Persian, Spanish	Swedish	Advanced	Elicitation-pictures
Hulstijn	32	Adults	English and nine others	Dutch	Mixed group	Listening-story retelling and interview
Andersen	1 <sup>a</sup>	Adolescent	English	Spanish	Beginning	Interviews
Muysken	14	Adults	Quechua	Spanish	Mixed group	Informal speech
Adiv	114	Children	English	French, Hebrew		Interview and picture-based tests
Harley	36	Children	English	French	Beginning, Intermediate	Interview
Trevisse & Noyau	8	Adults	Spanish	French	Mixed group	Casual speech & elicitation
Veronique	62	Adults	Arabic dialects	French	Advanced	Interviews & essays
Clahsen	3	Adults	Spanish	German	Mixed group	Informal interviews
Dittmar	7	Adults	Spanish	German	Beginning	Conversation
Pfaff	42	Children	Turkish, Greek	German	Intermediate, advanced	Discussion and directed conversation
Nicholas	1 <sup>a</sup>	Child	English	German	Beginning	Interviews
Stauble	12	Adults	Spanish, Japanese	English	Mixed group	Spontaneous speech
Schumann	5	Adults	Spanish	English	Beginning	Spontaneous speech
Zobl	7 <sup>b</sup>	Children	French	English	Beginning	Speech
Lightbown & Libben	—	Adolescents	French	English	Advanced	Free composition, cloze test and judgment tasks

<sup>a</sup>Case study.

<sup>b</sup>Three groups of subjects.

if cross-linguistic research could not eventually attain a level of abstraction that provided general and universal explanatory frameworks for what appear to be very language-specific phenomena, then there would be very little point in pursuing such cross-language comparisons (p. 4).

Such comparisons, in my view, are possible if and only if cross-linguistic research in second language acquisition is based on comparable data collected through comparable research procedures. I, however, agree with the editor that this volume, "is an important first step" toward that end.

In sum, this excellently edited volume contains an enormous wealth of refreshingly new ideas for cross-linguistic research and will prove to be a useful addition to the library of anyone who is interested in, and intrigued by, the complexities of second language acquisition. I share the editor's hope that "this book will promote more studies of this type, as a means of moving second language acquisition research closer to the ultimate goal of understanding the universal principles that govern the acquisition of *any* second language" (p. 12).

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*Ethnic Minorities and Dutch as a Second Language*. Guus Extra and Ton Vallen (Eds.). Dordrecht: Foris, 1985. Pp. 266.

In Western Europe, as in the United States, the educational progress of minority language children is becoming a matter of increasing concern. Traditionally monolingual communities in, for instance, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, and Germany have had to deal with increasing numbers of guest workers, whose children now constitute significant minorities in some school systems.